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SCULPTURED TOPE

ON AN OLD STONE AT DRAS, LADAK.

BY

WILLIAM SIMPSON, F.R.G.S.

LINGUISTIC PUBLICATIONS.

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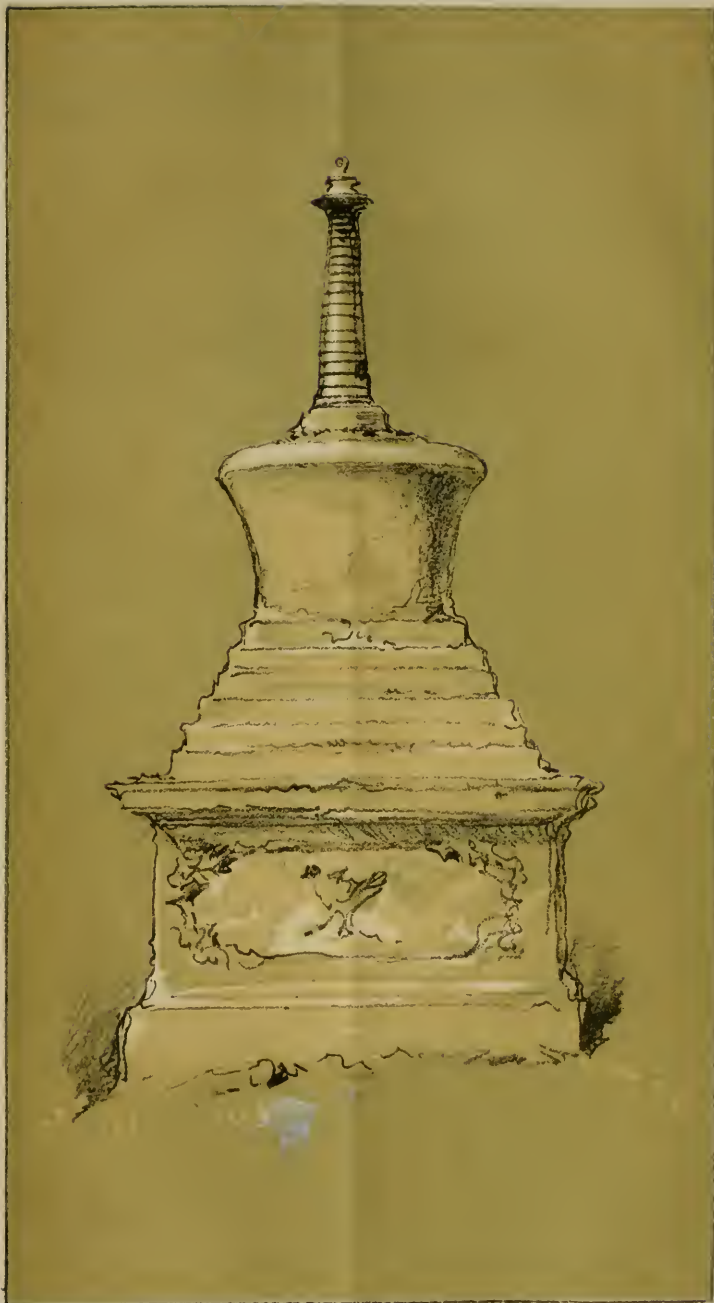
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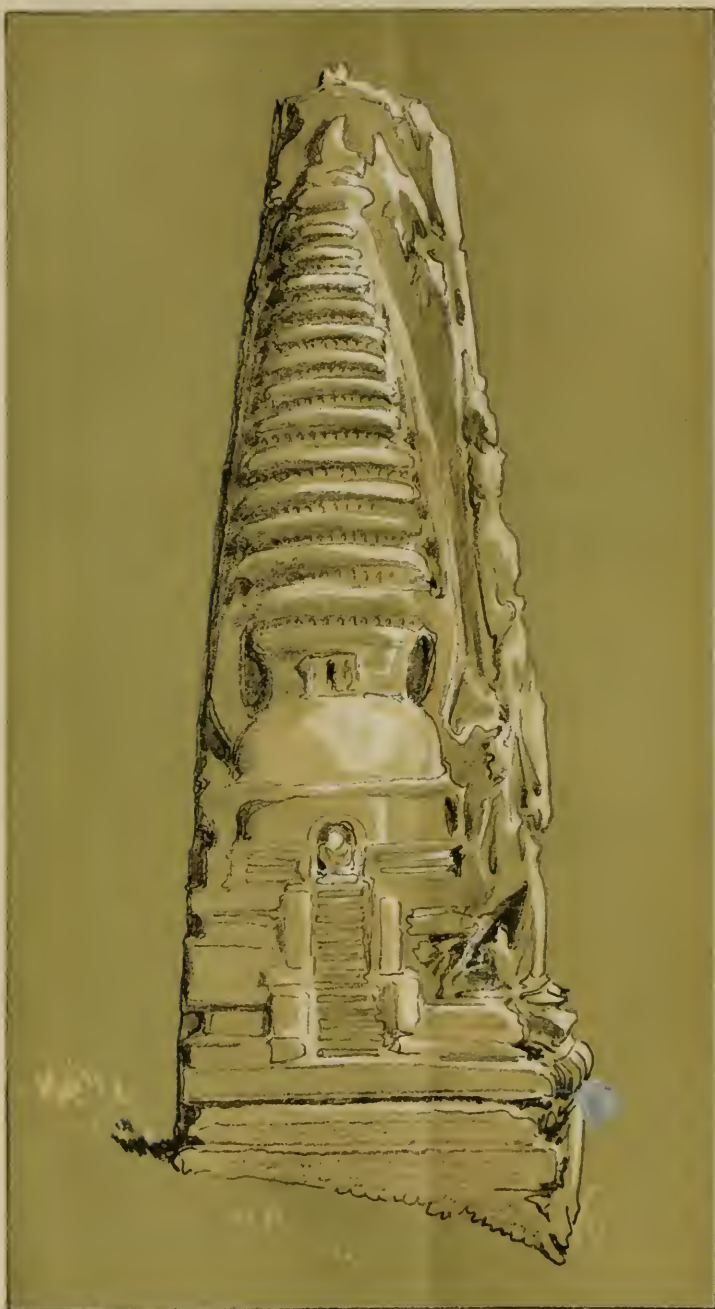
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CHORTEN,
OR BUDDHIST TOPE OF THE PRESENT DAY IN THIBET.



W. SIMPSON, LITH.

SCULPTURE OF TOPE ON OLD STONE AT DRAS, LADAK.

SKETCHED ON THE SPOT IN 1861. BY W. SIMPSON.

Herbert A. Giles Esq?
From the Author.
2. Feb. 1884.

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A SCULPTURED TOPE

ON AN OLD STONE AT DRAS, LADAK.

By WILLIAM SIMPSON, F.R.G.S.

DRAS is a village on the banks of a stream of the same name, about the distance of one march beyond the Bul-tul pass, on the road from Cashmere to Leh. There are two sculptured stones at this place, and as Cunningham has described them in his work on Ladak, I shall quote from him :

“On the side of the road, between the hamlet of Styalbo and the village of Drás, there are two pillars of granitic mica-slate, which the people call *Chomo*, or ‘The Women,’ but which, I believe, have no connection with Tibetan Buddhism, as the nearly obliterated inscriptions are in Kashmiri *Tákri*, and not in Tibetan characters. The eastern pillar has one principal figure, a four-armed female, and two attendant females, one on each side, and each with one leg bent. They all wear necklaces, earrings, amulets, and anklets. On the pedestal are several small kneeling figures with their hands raised and joined in attitudes of prayer. This pillar is six feet nine inches high, one foot six inches broad, and one foot thick. The western pillar has the same principal figure, also a four-armed female, with two attendant females on each side. This pillar is six feet high, two feet nine inches broad, and one foot thick. From the style of these figures, as well as from the nature of the alphabetical characters, I have no hesitation in stating my opinion that they are Brahminical statues erected by some Kashmirian Hindus. This opinion is strengthened by the fact that there is a third undoubted Hindu pillar standing close to them, which I believe to be a *Sati* pillar. On one side is sculptured a horseman, which is the usual emblem, placed on the pillar of a *Rajputni Sati*, to denote that her husband was a soldier. On the back of the pillar there is an inscription of eight lines in Kashmirian *Tákri*, which I am unable to translate satisfactorily.”—pp. 381–82.

Cunningham gives drawings of both stones; these with the above description are evidence that he must have devoted

considerable time to them, and yet he has quite overlooked a very important sculpture on the back of the eastern pillar. This is a representation of a Buddhist Tope. The style of sculpture of the female figures, so far as I am able to judge, is quite in keeping with Cunningham's conclusions; but we can scarcely suppose that the Tope was the work of Hindus. We are led from this to the supposition that the art on the one side belongs to a different date from that of the other; and we may also suppose that the Buddhist is the older of the two. It would be important if we knew the exact date of both styles of sculpture—this I cannot pretend to determine; all that may be said is, that we do not require to assume a very ancient date for either.

The value belonging to this representation of a Tope consists in its bearing on the form of the Topes of the Peshawer Valley, and of those at Jelalabad; and at the same time on the Chortens or Topes of the present day in Thibet.

The Topes of India, from Amravati to Manikyala, so far as we as yet know, have all round bases. The well-known "Buddhist Railing" of the Bhilsa Tope will recall to the mind the ground-plan of these structures. When we cross to the right bank of the Indus, we find a marked change—a square base appears; and from the Khyber Pass to Gundamuck this form seems to have been followed without any exception. Now in the drawing, here given, of the sculptured Tope at Dras, a square base is distinctly visible, showing that the form was derived from the right bank of the Indus, and not from the left. The Jelalabad Topes had a passage all round the square base a few feet from the ground, thus producing an appearance which might be described as two stages. In the sculptured example there are some indications which suggest stages, but I think they show that there must have been some departure from this type. The great Tope at Peshawer is described as having five stages, from which it is possible that in the Peshawer Valley the number at times varied.

The Topes beyond the Khyber had another distinguishing

feature; that was, they had stairs leading up to the top of the square base, where there was a platform used in some way for the ceremonials performed at these shrines. The small Topes had one stair, the larger had two, and the very largest had four, one on each side of the structure. These stairs on the more magnificent Topes must have had a very imposing appearance. In the sculptured Tope the stair appears prominently.

There is a small sculpture of a Tope in the Lahore Museum, it was found in the Peshawer Valley, and on it there is represented a sitting figure at the base of the circular part of it. From my own explorations at Jelalabad I should say that the Topes there had all figures in this position, and facing the stairs of approach. In no case did I find the remains of any of these figures, but in more than one Tope I found what I supposed were the remains of where it had been placed, and I assumed them to have been a part of the design before I had noticed the sculptured Tope in the Lahore Museum. This particular arrangement is very distinct in the Dras sculpture.¹

Thus far, I think, the remains of Topes beyond the Indus explain the peculiar points of the one found at Dras.

In a paper read to the Royal Institute of British Architects I attempted a restoration of one of the Jelalabad Topes.² From the ruined condition of the monuments, in no case did I find the summit of one of their domes. This left me destitute of any guidance as to the number or size of the surmounting umbrellas. The only hint available was what might have been derived from the small model of a Tope found at Manikyala,³ but as it was only a relic casket, and belonged to the Indian side of the Indus, it did not seem of sufficient authority, so I made no attempt to realize this part of the design, but merely indicated three umbrellas, that being a common number in the more southern

¹ In describing the Great Tope at Peshawer, Hiouen Tshang states: "Sur la face méridionale de l'escalier de pierre du Grand Stoupa, il y une image peinte du Bouddha, qui est haute de seize pieds."—Vol. i. p. 110.

² Read 12th Jan. 1880, in which a copy of the restoration is given.

³ Given in Fergusson's *Indian and Eastern Architecture*, p. 80.

Topes. I had completely forgotten this sketch of the Dras stone, which is in one of my old sketch-books; it was only the other day that I chanced to look it up, and its value as bearing on the Jelalabad Topes became at once apparent; and, on showing it to Mr. Fergusson, he recommended that it should be published, which I have much pleasure in now doing.

That this sculptured Tope gives an approximate idea of the umbrellas of the Trans-Indus Topes I will now proceed to show. By comparing it with the small model Tope found at Manikyala, a strong resemblance in the size and form of the umbrellas is distinctly visible. I have a photograph of a small sculptured Tope found in the Peshawer Valley, and now in the Lahore Museum; it has only three or perhaps four umbrellas, they form a solid pyramidal mass over the Tope, and the diameter of the lower one is equal, if it does not exceed, the diameter of the Tope beneath. This extensive width of the lower umbrella is exactly the case in the Dras Tope; where it will also be seen the larger number of umbrellas raises the pyramidal form into that of a spire, and it will at the same time be noticed that there is no pretence of a pole to support them, they form a solid structure, with some indication of ornament between each umbrella. We have not only the extended diameter of the umbrellas in this Dras Tope, and the large number of them—thirteen—but we have their great height, which forms quite a new feature in our knowledge of such structures in India. That this distinctive characteristic belonged to the Trans-Indus Topes I think can be made out pretty clearly. Hiouen Thsang gives a rather more detailed account of the Great Tope at Peshawer than is usual with him. He states that: “*Sur le sommet du Grand Stoûpa, il éleva encore une coupole en cuivre doré qui avait vingt-cinq étages.*”¹ This was by far the grandest Tope in India, and that may explain why there were such a number of Chattas; we may reasonably assume that the smaller Topes would have fewer, and that the number was variable. That they were

¹ Hiouen Thsang, transl. by M. Julien, vol. i. p. 108.

large in proportion to the Tope, and that they were arranged in a pyramidal form, towering high above the structure beneath, I have not the slightest doubt now in my own mind, after seeing the Dras sculpture. Vestiges of this arrangement can be pointed out in various directions. On the Tibetan Dagobas there is a spire on the summit, with a series of discs or rings; it will be seen that the Dras sculpture gives us the connecting link to this form. In Fergusson's *Indian and Eastern Architecture*,¹ there is an illustration of a monumental gateway to a Buddhist monastery in Pekin; over the gateway is a Tope of the Tibetan form, in which it will be seen these rings or discs are combined into a pyramidal mass. In the same work will be found another illustration of the same arrangement, that is, the Temple of Swayambunath, in Nepal.² This last is, in fact, a Tope or Dagoba, and it is surmounted by a spire formed of thirteen discs, the same number as the Dras sculpture. That these discs were derived from umbrellas has all along been generally assumed, but up to the present we had no monumental evidence to show its derivation. This, I think, has now been found.

In my restoration of the Ahin Posh Tope at Jelalabad, I had authority for all its parts, except the surmounting umbrellas. In order to complete that restoration there should be added, as it was a large Tope, let us say, a spire of thirteen umbrellas, and I believe you will have a very fair rendering of what the structure was like. There is one bit of detail in the Dras Tope, which is too roughly represented for us to realize its exact character. It is most probably an external support for the umbrellas; it starts from the dome of the Tope, and is continued like a frame on the outside of the umbrellas up to the pinnacle. Such a mass of umbrellas, whether made of copper or other material, would be heavy, as well as liable to be blown down by storms—I can speak of the strength of the wind in the Jelalabad Valley from experience—and means would be necessary to prevent this. As the um-

¹ p. 693.

² p. 302.

brellas were gilt and ornamented, we may assume that this part of the construction would be the same, but the sculpture gives us no indication of this. In the Tope on the gateway at Pekin, already mentioned, there is an ornamental form which hangs down on the side of the discs; this may perhaps be a vestige of it. If this is not the correct explanation, the only other suggestion which occurs is, that it was a garland of flowers—of which we have a well-defined example among the Bharhut Sculptures.

I come now to deal with this sculpture in relation to the Tibetan Topes. We know the form of the tee of the Peshawer Valley Topes from a couple of small ones in the Lahore Museum; they resemble the one on the Casket Tope found at Manikyala. They all have a projecting cornice on the upper part. On comparing them with the tee of the Dras sculpture, I should say that the form there shown had resulted from a continued copying of the first one in a rude manner, till the mouldings of the cornice had been lost in the process. The use of plaster, in thick coatings,—which was the practice beyond the Indus, and no doubt went from that region into Ladak, for the Chortens there at the present day are still thickly coated,—will easily account for the change in form which has occurred. If this should turn out to be a fact, it gives us a very curious transformation. I have made a rough outline of a Tibetan Tope, of which there are numbers in almost every village at the present day, in some places they are more numerous than the houses. Now in these Chortens, what we would call the body of the Tope is exactly the form of the tee of this sculptured Tope at Dras. The spire, but in a reduced form, has been retained, but the dome below has in course of time disappeared from the design, and become merely a part of the square base, and is represented now by a few plinths, like steps.

Should this suggestion of mutation be accepted, we have an important question to determine as to how this was brought about. Very great changes of this sort may be accounted for by a long period of copying and re-copying by clumsy workmen; but, although possible, it is difficult to

believe that the principal part of the structure could have been entirely lost. This process of undevelopment might have taken place, but it does not prevent other suggestions from being considered. We may take it for granted that the Thibetans had mounds, or cairns, and even dagobas, before the style of construction beyond the Indus had penetrated to the Himalayas. Two centuries and a half before Christ Buddhist missionaries went to Kashmere, and that is long before the Indo-Classical style had been used for the Buddhist structures in the Peshawer Valley. Mr. Fergusson has thrown out the idea that the tee of the Buddhist Dagoba was originally a tomb, or at least a simulated relic casket. This theory I feel much inclined to adopt. The so-called tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadæ presents itself as an illustration in its favour. George Smith described to me the Zigarets of the Euphrates Valley as having been placed on the tops of mounds, and they are only small shrines reminding one of the usually given restoration of the Tower of Babel. We have thus a well-authenticated type from which it is quite possible that the tee may have originated. Mr. Fergusson mentions another illustration—the tomb of Akbar at Secundra, with the simulated coffin on its summit. It is quite possible that the Tibetans may have had some customary form of their ancestral mounds or cairns, with rites attached, which caused them to look on what we call the tee as the most important part of the Dagoba, and hence the reason that the dome was neglected.

In the paper read to the Royal Institute of British Architects, the probability was pointed out that the Tibetan Chorten was derived from the Indus Valley. I need scarcely point out that this sculpture at Dras goes a long way to establish the idea. The square base on which they rest seemed to me a strong reason for this conclusion. As the *pushim* of Tibet still finds its way into India through Kashmere, it is pretty strong evidence that that is the natural route into Northern Thibet at least; and the style of art and architecture followed in the Peshawer Valley, and which was celebrated in the early centuries of the Christian era, no doubt forced

its way through this passage. The Tibetan Chorten is wide in its resemblance to the Bhilsa Tope; compare the Chortens, however, with the Topes of Jelalabad and those near Peshawer, and the resemblance is not so distant. The absence of the dome and the stairs shows a considerable modification, which time has produced. For the one change I have thrown out some hints, which further research may confirm or demolish; for the other nothing can be said at present in the way of elucidation.

There is still another probability to be derived from this sculptured stone; and that is with reference to the Pagodas of China. The origin of these structures has not up to the present been quite satisfactorily accounted for. About eight years ago, when in China, I tried to get information on the subject. All I could learn was, that they were imitations of buildings in India. Mr. Edkins, as well as others, assured me that the old Chinese books distinctly stated that such was the case. To one acquainted with the architecture of India, the difficulty was to discover what particular form of structure had been copied. The only explanation which offered itself was, that the Dagoba might have been the form that was followed, but that the umbrellas had got multiplied, and increased in size, till they became roofs, and each with a room under it. Place a drawing of a Pagoda from Southern China beside the Bhilsa Tope, and I think no one would suspect any connexion between the two; but, however unlike in this case, we had instances where the upper portion of the Dagoba is more extended, and its exaggeration into the Pagoda was thus a theory which might be accepted. In the absence of almost any other theory being likely, this became the most probable. Still it wanted something like monumental evidence to give it a satisfactory confirmation, and that has been found in this sculptured Tope under consideration. A glance at its high tower of umbrellas will show that its transformation into a Pagoda was easy. The pictures of Chinese Pagodas which we generally see are those of Southern China. Now in the North, particularly about Peking, the style is different. I can name two examples—the Tien-

Ning-Si, close to the western wall of Peking, and the Pa-Li-Chwang Pagoda, on the north of Peking. The design of these, although differing in the ornamental details, is essentially the same. Instead of a room under each roof, the roofs are represented as constructed on each other, and there are thirteen of them in each of these Pagodas, exactly the same number as in the umbrellas in the Dras sculpture. Under the lower roof only are the walls of an inclosed space. A Pagoda of this kind will be found in Fergusson's *Indian and Eastern Architecture*.¹ It is at Tung-Chow, about fifteen miles from Peking; it also has thirteen roofs, showing that this was a very favourite number. The octagonal form of the Chinese Pagoda resulted from a very mystical figure of eight sides, called the "*Pah-Kwah*," the importance of which in Chinese ideas will be familiar to those who have read the Yih-King. Having accounted for this peculiarity of these Peking Pagodas, it will be seen, if we remove the distinctive construction as well as the ornament of the Chinese style from them, that what is left would be almost identical with this Tope sculptured on the pillar at Dras. I feel satisfied that we may take it as now established that the Chinese Pagoda was copied from the Topes of the Indus Valley and Afghanistan.

Probably the date when this style of building began in China may be found in the old books of that country. It may be assumed that it would be about the time when the Pilgrims were sent to India for books and statues; we might be pretty certain that they would carry back the details of the Buddhist religious buildings, and more particularly that of the Dagobas. We have direct information from Hiouen Thsang on this point. He died in 664, and just previous to his death a large stupa was erected for the preservation of the books and statues he had brought with him. It is stated that: "Dans sa construction, on avait imité fidèlement la forme adoptée dans l'Inde. Elle avait cinq escaliers et était surmontée d'une coupole; sa hauteur totale était de cent

¹ p. 697.

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quatre-vingts pieds.”¹ Here we have the stairs copied, which were a marked feature of the Trans-Indus Topes, of which no trace is left in the Pagodas now. There must be an error either in the translation, or it may have crept into the Chinese original, as to the number of them; it is difficult to understand how five stairs could be arranged on a four-sided structure, and Hiouen Tshang must have been too familiar with this, having seen so many Topes in India, to have made the blunder. The Peshawer Tope had five stages, and its celebrity may have made it the model, and it is possible the mistake may be on this point.

That it was by way of Tibet that the type of the Pagoda went to China, we have an additional evidence in the fact that the form of the present Tibetan Chorten has also penetrated along the same route. We find one on the gate of the Buddhist monastery already referred to. In Peking there is an exact facsimile of a Chorten on some rising ground near the marble bridge on the west of the palace; it is called the “White Ming Pagoda,” and I was told that it contained a scab from Buddha’s body. I saw another at Chin-Kiang, on the Yantze Kiang. It stands over a narrow street, the passage underneath is formed by large stone lintels, supported by perpendicular blocks, with bracket capitals, which are unlike Chinese architecture, but would not seem strange in India. I could get no information on the spot as to how this very peculiar mixture of architecture came to Chin-Kiang, for the Hindu architecture of the passage, combined with the Chorten, would be as curious an anomaly if found in Tibet as on the banks of the Yantze Kiang.

Since this paper was written I have found a passage in Mr. Edkins’ *Chinese Buddhism* which is worth adding, as it not only bears upon the dates of the Chinese Pagodas, but also on the names given to them in China.

“The number of pagodas in China is very great. There are nine within thirty miles of Shanghai At Lo-yang, in the

¹ Vie et Voyages de Hiouen Tshang, p. 318.

Tsiu dynasty (A.D. 350), there were forty-two, from three to nine stories high, richly painted, and formed after Indian models. The word *t'a* (formerly *t'ap*), now in universal use, has displaced the older names *feu-t'a* (*budu*) and *fo-t'u* (*buddu*). The original purpose of the edifice was to deposit relics of Buddha. These relics might be a hair, tooth, metamorphosed piece of bone, article of dress, or rice vessel. When bodies of deceased Boddhisattwas and other revered persons were burnt, the remains were placed in structures which received the same name, *t'upa* or *st'upa*, and it is these that have been described by travellers, in Afghanistan and other regions where Buddhism formerly prevailed, as *topes*.

“ ‘When there is no ‘relic’ [*she-li*; in Sanskrit *sharira*], says the Cyclopædia *Fa-yuen-chu-lin*, ‘the building is called *Chi-ti*’ [in Sanskrit *Chaitya*], and it may be intended to commemorate the birth-place of Buddha, the spot where he became enlightened, where he taught, or where he entered into the Nirvâna. Footsteps of Buddha, an image of a Bodhisattwa or of a Pratyeka Buddha, are also honoured with the erection of a *Chi-ti*.”—Chinese Buddhism. By the Rev. Joseph Edkins, D.D., pp. 134–5.

From this we see that the names came to China with the models from India.

The Rev. S. Beal, in his Introduction to Fah-Hian, p. xxiv, also mentions the forty-two pagodas at Lo-yang, as having been “formed after Indian models.” He also gives some data which explain how the models most probably came to that place. A Shaman called Dharmarakcha came from the western countries bringing a large number of Buddhist and Brahminical works, which he presented to the Imperial Court. This man took up his residence at Lo-yang, where he was employed with other Shamans from 265 A.D. to 308 A.D. translating Buddhist books. Lo-yang is now known as Honan, and Edkins mentions a native of India, called Kashiapmadanga, who came to China shortly after 61 A.D. and died at Lo-yang; but there is no notice of Pagodas at this early date, hence it may be concluded that the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century is the period when Pagodas after the Indian models were first introduced.

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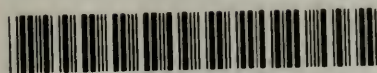
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